

# **Vera Institute of Justice**

## **Youth who are chronically AWOL from Foster Care**

### **Summarization of the Study**

- AWOL is a marker of other problems
- Youth with a history of AWOL that go into foster care have worse school attendance and attend school less often after placement than other foster care youth with out a history of AWOL
- Status offenders in foster care go AWOL more than other youth
- NYC Administration for Children's Services average 4000 AWOLs per year
- AWOL youth is usually 15 years old or older and ¾ of the AWOL youth come from group homes
- Found that AWOL is concentrated among a small number of youth
- 3% of the youth that entered care went AWOL more than twice but accounted for 54% of the AWOL events
- Very few AWOL youth spent time on the street, most stayed with friends
- 2/3 of the AWOL youth returned voluntarily
- 1/3 of the AWOL youth encountered no risk, 1/3 encountered moderate risk, and 1/3 encountered high risk situations
- Most AWOL youth left because of perceived or actual problems with placement (belief that the current placement wasn't correct and feeling disempowered, they thought their case was not progressing as it should, boredom, or to see a boyfriend or girlfriend)
- Suggestions by care facilities on how they prevent AWOL
  1. Provide a counseling session after a youth runs to find out more about why the youth went AWOL and where they went
  2. Extend curfew and be more flexible
  3. Allow more home passes
  4. Punitive such as increased supervision and lose privileges such as take away single room, not allowed home passes, etc. (some believed this increased the youths desire to AWOL again)
- Youth enter foster care 40% had one or more AWOL (most experienced emotional or psychological problems before entering foster care so treatment and counseling of these youth is greatly needed)
- 11% of the youth said that they wouldn't run if problems related to placement were resolved or if an alternative placement was offered
- Youth that have a history of running prior to placement are much more likely to AWOL
- Youth running from a group home are less likely to sleep on the streets than youth running from their family home
- Most youth have a specific destination before leaving and very few had nowhere to go (destination include friends, family or boyfriend/Girlfriend) -Most AWOL youth visit friends
- Youth with an abusive family background tend to associate with negative networks of people which increase the risk they encounter
- There was no relationship found between number of AWOLs and increased risk

### **Solutions**

1. Find a more appropriate placement for the youth
2. Identify interests of the youth and activities that the youth enjoys and develop a care plan that incorporates those activities
3. Decrease boredom by offering more activities
4. Increase home passes
5. Develop a more flexible environment (example: be more flexible with regard to being late from a home passes)
6. Increase the connection to the staff and peers (example resolve peer issues immediately, provide groups to establish relationships, provide an environment where staff can establish a connection with the youth, offer close monitoring of youth with a history of running)
7. Decrease AWOLs due to visiting boyfriends/girlfriends by instituting a Pregnancy/HIV/STD Curriculum